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PUBLIC OUTDOOR RELIEF.¹

I.

EPITOME OF ARGUMENTS FROM WARNER'S "AMERICAN CHARITIES."

PROFESSOR WARNER, in his book on *American Charities*,² admirably summarizes the arguments for and against outdoor relief:

"Unless otherwise specified, the term 'outdoor relief' will mean the relief given from the public funds to the poor in their homes, not including medical relief."

"The following are the principal reasons assigned by those who believe in the maintenance of outdoor relief as a fundamental part of the relieving system:

"(1) It is believed to be kindly. The poor person is not separated from relatives and friends, families are not broken up, and the receipt of relief is not as conspicuous, and consequently as disgraceful, as it is where resort must be had to an institution.

"(2) It is apparently economical. Many families can almost support themselves, and it seems folly to dismember them and place the children in refuges or board them in private families, and compel the adults to resort to the poorhouse, when a little relief given in the home would keep the family together and enable them to make part of their support by ordinary methods. Those who receive outdoor relief receive usually less than it would cost to maintain the same number of persons in the almshouse.

"(3) There are not institutions enough. The demand for relief always keeps considerably in advance of the supply; and it would be uneconomical, and in fact impossible, to have buildings enough to accommodate all who should be relieved from

¹ [Compiled by PROFESSOR CHARLES A. ELLWOOD, of the University of Missouri. The purpose of this paper is to present, in the language of special students, the arguments for and against public outdoor relief, and to direct the reader to available sources of information.—EDITORS.]

² Published 1894.

time to time. Especially in the winter months, a large number of persons need relieving for a short time; and if the almshouses were large enough to accommodate them during the winter, there would be great buildings vacant during the summer.

"On the other side the following considerations are urged:

"(1) It increases the number of applicants, because it is less manifestly disgraceful than the indoor system, and is much more pleasant to receive for other obvious reasons. The saving in cost for a single person supported is more than made up by the additional number of persons that will claim to require relief. It is a sufficiently pleasant form of being relieved, so that, if no requirement except indigency is made, a large number of persons will become duly indigent in order to qualify for the receipt of alms.

"(2) It is urged that outdoor relief is undesirable, because it requires an amount of discrimination between cases that is practically impossible where the work is done by public officials. It has long been a principle that any work was suitable for a government to do in proportion as it could be reduced to a routine and done in a semi-mechanical way. As the work of giving outdoor relief cannot be done in this semi-mechanical way, it is unsuitable for public officials to undertake.

"(3) It is urged that corruption of politics results from the system, and that, in fact, the whole tone of the population is lowered where this form of relief is given. In many cases it is unworthy motives favoring the retention of the system that make it difficult to secure its abolition.

"(4) Where outdoor relief has been given lavishly, as in England at some times and places, it has simply resulted in reducing the rate of wages, the amount given in relief being reckoned on as a possible resource, so that the employé would accept lower wages than would otherwise have been possible."

Professor Warner states his own opinion as follows: "Those who favor the system of outdoor relief usually argue upon theory, or draw their facts from rural communities where the problems are comparatively simple and where abuses are readily checked. On the other hand, the opposers of the system deal

mainly with facts, and these facts are very largely gleaned from the administration of outdoor relief in large cities.

"On the whole, it must be admitted that the advisability of giving outdoor relief is a question of administration. Under the Elberfeld system, in Germany, and with the great care exercised by the Bureaux de Bienfaisance of France, it has been successful. But it must be remembered that the people of the United States have a larger share of administrative awkwardness than any other civilized population. Nearly all the experiences in this country indicate that outdoor relief is a source of corruption to politics, of expense to the community, and of degradation and increased pauperization to the poor. Whether at its worst or at its best, it has not been found a satisfactory method of relieving distress. In the new communities of the West it has seemed to be almost necessary; it is always, however, to be watched with care, to be kept at a minimum, and in large cities to be definitively prohibited." (Pp. 166-8, 174-5.)

NOTE.—For an admirable summary of English opinion and arguments, both for and against public outdoor relief, see Miss Gertrude Lubbock's book on *Some Poor Relief Questions*, chap. i.

II.

TYPICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST PUBLIC OUTDOOR RELIEF.

MRS. CHARLES RUSSEL LOWELL.

Public relief is money paid by the bulk of the community to certain members of the community; not, however, paid voluntarily or spontaneously by those interested in the individuals receiving it, but paid by public officers from money raised by taxation.

The only justification for the expenditure of public money is that it is necessary for the public good. Before public outdoor relief can rightly be given, therefore, it is necessary to prove that it is necessary for the community at large. Now every dollar raised by taxation comes out of the pocket of some individual, usually a poor individual, and makes him so much the poorer, and therefore the question is between the man who earned the dollar by hard work, and needs it to buy himself and

his family a day's food, and the man who, however worthy and suffering, did not earn it, but wants it to be given to him to buy himself and his family a day's food. That the law of the land, by the hand of a public officer, should take the dollar from him who earned it and hand it over to the man who did not earn it, seems to be an act of gross tyranny and injustice. It is granted that it is good for the community that no one be allowed to starve, but where shall be found the proof that starvation is imminent? Only by putting such conditions upon the giving of public relief that, presumably, persons not in danger of starvation will not consent to receive it. To those who object that, because the community relieves a person, that person should not, therefore, be reduced to pauperism by being placed in an institution, the only answer is that the receiving of relief from the community constitutes pauperism; and the refuge from pauperism is either in self-support or else in the obtaining of help from private sources.

If an income was paid to every member of a community regardless of his own exertions or character, the result would be a diminution in the energy and earning capacity of the recipients. That is exactly the effect on those who receive public relief, except that there is also added a moral degradation, because there is a stigma attached to public relief, arising from the fact that the money received is actually the property of individuals, taken from them against their will and not belonging to the public. If the advocates of public relief contend that there should be no stigma attached to its receipt, the answer is that in that case the tendency would be toward the condition where the whole people would be ready to accept an income from so-called public funds, and that the resulting loss of energy and industry would be sufficient to plunge any nation into a greater poverty than any now suffers. I am persuaded, therefore, that the only safe way to provide public relief is under such stringent conditions that no one shall be tempted to accept it except in an extremity, and under such conditions, also, as will as soon as possible make the recipient of help able to support himself again and do his part in supporting others. I mean that public relief

should be indoor relief, inside the doors of an institution, where cure and education should be the primary objects aimed at — *cure* of disease, moral, mental, and physical, and *education* in self-control and self-dependence.

My argument, in brief, is that the work of the mass of every community is an absolute necessity, in order to provide for it the means of living; that no human being will work *to provide the means of living for himself* if he can get a living in any other manner agreeable to himself; and that the community cannot afford to tempt its members who are able to work for a living to give up working for a living by offering to provide a living otherwise; and that public relief must be confined to those who cannot work for a living; and the only way to test whether they can or not is to make the living provided by the public always less agreeable than the living provided by the individual for himself, and the way to do this is to provide it under strict rules inside an institution.¹

PROFESSOR C. R. HENDERSON.

This kind of relief is *unnecessary*. Private charity would supply all the necessities of such cases, if the state simply and instantly withdrew from this field and ceased to levy taxes for this purpose. Official charity is costly beyond properly administered private charity. It is easy to be liberal with funds raised from the public. It costs no appreciable sacrifice to be generous at the common expense.

The existence of a fund for outdoor relief is a constant menace of political corruption. This is especially true where the fund is administered by a single township trustee, without criticism from persons of opposite partisan motives. It is not so true where the fund is managed by a board made up of both parties. But the fund itself presents this temptation.

Public outdoor relief tends to *separate society into classes*. It aggravates a peril which is already great. It accentuates the difference between rich and poor. It makes the only bond between the prosperous and the broken that of the officials who

¹"The Economic and Moral Effects of Public Outdoor Relief," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, 1891, pp. 81-5.

dole relief from a treasury. When those who give to the poor visit them in their homes, there is a personal tie of humanity; but when the state interferes to do this work, that tie snaps. Prejudices are increased, bitter feelings are fostered in the unfortunate and forgotten.

This system does actually tend to extinguish that very spirit of humanity which gave it birth. It is not safe for the well-to-do to forget the existence of their poor neighbors. Nothing hardens character more than the ease with which poverty is shut out of sight by the successful. So long as there is distress in the world, the rich need to know it by contact, and not by official reports alone.

The tendency of outdoor relief is to lower wages. This it does it several ways. Money taken by taxation is so much taken from the productive capital of the country, and from the wages fund. Subsidized labor, working by the side of unsubsidized labor, can and will take work at lower rates, and compel the entire class to accept the lower rates. The law punishes the thrifty to reward the thriftless. This history of the English poor law gives ample and painful illustrations of this assertion; but at the door of our own city poor offices we can observe the same fact at work. In a new country, where labor is still in great demand most of the time, the full evil effects cannot be seen. But the dangerous system is here ready to do all its natural mischief in times of reverses and crowded population.

The system tends to excite hostility to the state itself. First, relief educates a large class to look to government for help; and when this is received the feeling of dependence increases. The *poor* man has become a *pauper*, a beggar. A willing pauper is near to being a thief. As the state excites hope which it can never fulfill, a time comes when the pauper is a public enemy. Having been educated by the state to be a beggar, he turns upon the state because it does not recognize his demand for support to be based upon "natural rights."

None of these considerations weigh against personal and voluntary charity, which is a *favor*, and not a *legal obligation*, and which may be suspended when the demand is made in the name

of right. On the other hand, private and church charities have their perils. In abolishing outdoor official relief and permitting freedom for private charity in this field, the state dares not relinquish the right to inspect and control all charities, where there is danger of increasing the evils of pauperism.¹

NOTE.—Professor Henderson states that he has somewhat modified his opinion since the above was written. He would not now condemn public outdoor relief *as such*, although, he says, the perils of the system demand utmost vigilance and care, and the abolition of outdoor official relief should be sought as an ideal. In his work on *Dependents, Defectives, and Delinquents* (1893), p. 44, Professor Henderson says: "We are obliged to deal with a relatively permanent fact, that outdoor official relief is a part of our social custom, side by side with voluntary beneficence. Both forms of relief are liable to abuses. Church and private charity in Italy and France produced increasing beggary, and the same evils grew to unbearable proportions under the poor law of England. The worst evils are due more to the character of the people, and to existing social forces and opportunities, than to any peculiar system of relief. At present it is a question of administration, and practical measures must be directed to the improvement of methods of administration. With a reformed poor law England was able to diminish its pauperism while continuing outdoor official relief."

ROBERT D. M'GONNIGLE.

The more I study outdoor relief, the more I am convinced that it should be placed in the hands of organized charitable societies. I am in sympathy with anything in the way of outdoor relief as handled by charitable societies. The only good that can come from outdoor relief is in what is granted through such channels. The examination of the poor-law officials becomes mechanical, and there is not the thorough investigation into cases there should be; and the result is that relief is granted finally without proper examination. Every time the applicant receives relief, the bolder and more impudent he becomes. He begins to think he has a right to it, that there is no disgrace attached to receiving it, and that any examination on the part of the poor-law officials is impudence.

If the same amount of outdoor relief was granted through organized societies, it would do a greater amount of good. The recipient would not feel that the relief was granted by taxation,

¹ "Symposium on Public Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1891, pp. 28-49.

but by voluntary contributions. He would feel that he has no right to it, except because he has been unfortunate, and needs temporary assistance; that the society has a right to investigate the case, and that he must be satisfied with the examination. Then, again, large numbers of the recipients of outdoor relief are of such a class that they need help other than the mere relief they receive, and should have lessons in industry, sobriety, and economy, have employment obtained for them, have the children set to school, and be helped in hundreds of other ways that will make them useful and self-sustaining; and this work can be done only by a charitable organization.¹

LEVI L. BARBOUR.

To my mind there is another very strong reason why outdoor relief should not be provided. It is everywhere, and by all, admitted to be very desirable that the human race should be improved, and that this can in a great measure be accomplished by breeding from the higher classes instead of from the lower. It is also generally known that those demanding outdoor relief are not members of the higher classes come to grief, but of the lowest. Regardless of all responsibility for it, they bring into the world a race of dependents physically, morally, and mentally deficient. Now, if, when these deficient and delinquent members of the lower classes give evidence that self-support is impossible, they are retained in institutions properly regulated, while the individuals are cared for, the propagation of their kind is at least checked.²

NOTE.—A similar argument is implied in McCulloch's paper on "The Tribes of Ishmael," *N. C. C.*, 1888, pp. 154-60. See also Dugdale, "The Jukes."

PROFESSOR WAYLAND.

Outdoor relief has hitherto been mainly administered in one of three ways: (1) with funds raised by taxation and distributed by paid officials; (2) with funds raised by taxation and distributed by a municipal board, in accordance with the recommendation of a body of unpaid officials or supervisors selected from reputable citizens; (3) with funds raised by voluntary contributions and distributed by unpaid agents.

¹ *Idem.*

² *Idem.*

The second method is well known as the Elberfeld system of outdoor relief. It has been in active operation in the German town of that name, near Düsseldorf, since 1853, has been copied in several of the neighboring towns, and has shown some remarkable results.

The characteristic feature of the Elberfeld system is the very minute and constant supervision carried on by unpaid visitors of the best class, selected from representatives of various callings. It is considered essential to the successful prosecution of the system that the district assigned to each visitor should be very small, and the poor under his inspection very few, never to exceed four families, so that he can do his work thoroughly, without encroaching upon the hours required for his regular occupation. The visitors are instructed to make a careful investigation of each case, ascertaining what means of support the applicant may have, what relatives are able to contribute to his maintenance, what is his capacity for labor, and all other facts pertinent to the inquiry. The visitor then makes his report to the municipal board, which is to determine whether any relief shall be granted and to what extent. In cases of great urgency, however, the visitor is authorized to give temporary assistance, pending the decision of the board. The relief is always granted for a brief period, and the cases are frequently reheard and revised. Care is uniformly taken that while sufficient aid is furnished it shall not be given in such generous measure as to make public charity attractive. There are, moreover, strict police regulations, punishing with imprisonment refusal to work when employment can be had, wasting the relief granted, and mispending time in amusement, idleness, or drink, in such a manner as to render public aid necessary. The system is still further fenced about with other restrictions and precautions, which, together with its peculiar official machinery, need not be detailed here. The essential and controlling idea of the system is the minute and constant supervision of applicants for relief by intelligent and trustworthy citizens, each having a small number of families under his charge, with this limitation imposed upon their operations that the aid actually furnished shall be, as a

rule, distributed by still another class, to wit, the paid servants of the municipal board.

(Professor Wayland thinks the application of the Elberfeld system in the country impracticable, and therefore argues against all public outdoor relief, using arguments similar to those above.¹)

NOTE.—Opinions, in substance the same as those quoted, will be found in Mr. Seth Low's paper on "Outdoor Relief in United States," *N. C. C.*, 1881, and in his paper on "The Problem of Pauperism in Brooklyn and New York," *N. C. C.*, 1879, pp. 200-210; in the "Symposium" in *N. C. C.*, 1891, already referred to (Dr. R. D. McGonnigle, Mr. C. O. Holden, and Dr. H. C. Taylor); also in the debate on "Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1878, pp. 72-9 (General Brinkerhoff, Dr. Byers, Professor Wayland); and in discussions in *N. C. C.* of papers noted above. See also *Proceedings of International Congress of Charities*, 1893 (especially the paper by Mr. Robert Treat Paine).

III.

TYPICAL ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR RELIEF.

F. B. SANBORN.

In Massachusetts, during the ten years ending April 1, 1889, the average number of persons partially supported by what is commonly called outdoor relief was at least 16,000, while the average number fully supported has been less than 8,000. Yet the cost of maintaining the 8,000 persons has been more than \$1,000,000 annually, while the cost of supporting the 16,000 outdoor paupers has been less than \$650,000 annually. The average annual cost of each outdoor pauper, or recipient of family aid, was less than \$40 for a year of fifty-two weeks, while the average yearly cost of each indoor pauper was more than \$139; and, if interest on the value of the almshouses, asylums, etc., where the indoor poor lived, were added, their yearly cost would go up to \$180 at least, or four and one-half times as much as the cost of the outdoor poor.

Here we see one reason why outdoor relief is everywhere and always more common than indoor relief: for the same sum of money a much greater number of poor can be aided. But another cogent reason is that there never have been anywhere, and perhaps never will be, almshouses, workhouses, hospitals, and

¹ "Report on Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1877, pp. 46-54.

other places of indoor relief in sufficient number to contain all the poor at any season, or half of them in seasons of special destitution. It is unreasonable to expect a community to put all its paupers into public buildings if there is room in those buildings for less than a third of them, which is the fact. There are persons, be the number greater or less, who need public relief in their own homes, and who can receive it there with greater advantage both to themselves and to the public than anywhere else. Concerning this class of persons that excellent economist, the younger Pitt, said in Parliament in 1796: "The law which prohibits giving relief where any visible property remains should be abolished. The degrading condition should be withdrawn. No temporary occasion should force a British subject to part with the last shilling of his little capital, and to descend to a state of wretchedness from which he could never recover, merely that he might be entitled to a casual supply." What Mr. Pitt said concerning a British subject is none the less true when applied to free American citizens. Great care should be taken, in relieving their distress, not to throw them into the great class of vagrant and homeless poor, to which belong many of the inmates of our public establishments, when they go forth from an almshouse, a hospital, an insane asylum, or a prison, into the general community. Let us, then, adopt as the starting-point of our system of public charities what the French call *secours à domicile*, and what we have termed "family" or "household aid." Let it be—as by the great law of nature it must be—the initial point of public charity.

So far as experience can teach anything, it teaches us that both indoor relief and family aid, or outdoor relief, as properly practiced, are both indispensable in any comprehensive plan of public charity. Wherever and whenever one of these methods has been wholly given up, accidentally or purposely, evils have followed which only the introduction of the omitted method could wholly remove. Where to draw the line between the practical use of the two methods for individual cases of poverty is a matter to be determined only by wise discretion on the part of the officers who administer public relief.¹

¹ "Indoor and Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1890, pp. 75-80.

NOTE.—In a paper on "Outdoor Public Relief in Massachusetts," *N. C. C.*, 1895, pp. 61–6, Mr. Thomas F. Ring agrees in substance with Mr. Sanborn. He says: "If honestly and carefully administered, I am decidedly in favor of continuing outdoor relief as it is carried on in Boston and the state of Massachusetts."

ISAAC P. WRIGHT.

All relief afforded the poor should be public and dispensed under the authority of the people through their representatives elected or appointed. The funds for relief should be gathered by assessment or taxation, thus making the burden equal among rich and poor. Private relief should not be given. Whenever anyone applies to a private citizen for aid, he should be sent to the one place where, after his case has been thoroughly investigated, proper action would be taken. Thus there can be no such thing as imposing upon charitably disposed persons, as is often the case. Public aid cannot be refused in cases of sickness, where all means of the family are exhausted, and the children left to suffer the pangs of hunger. Neither can widows with many children be expected to be entirely self-supporting. Women with large families are deserted by their husbands: how can they get along without public aid? I do not believe in bestowing public relief with a lavish hand. On the contrary, it should be given only after a searching inquiry in all matters pertaining to the case, and then only temporarily. Continued aid would only encourage pauperism. So the applicants are informed that the relief given is only temporary, and that every effort must be made by them to find employment. Outdoor relief is justified, not only as the most economical, but likewise in the interest of public and private morals. To dispense with public outdoor relief, properly administered, would be a calamity in any community. There can be no adequate remedy to take its place, and the poor would be obliged from sheer necessity to resort to crime.¹

GEORGE E. M'GONEGAL.

The people to whom outdoor relief is mostly administered may be divided into four classes; and for convenience we will

¹ "Symposium on Public Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1891, pp. 28–49.

name individual cases to represent the different classes, and then proceed to discuss the effect of the system upon each of these cases :

First, a man who is temporarily incapacitated, through sickness or other disability, from performing his accustomed work, and who has a family dependent upon his daily labor for support.

Second, a man who is abundantly able to work, but during certain seasons of the year is unable to obtain employment, and all his resources for maintaining his family are, for the time being, cut off.

Third, a woman who by the death or desertion of her husband is left with several small children to care for, and is only able by her utmost exertions and strictest economy to partially clothe and feed her children.

Fourth, aged people who have been respectable, sober, and industrious during their early lives, but who, through some unlucky turn of fortune's wheel, have become dependent in their old age.

In the first-mentioned case, if the man previous to that time has been sober and industrious, and his family respectable, it would seem hard and cruel to send them to an almshouse, as by so doing they would be humiliated, their pride crushed, and it would be difficult for them to recover from the shock. A little outdoor relief would seem to be the best adapted to such a case, and yet there is danger in it. When such a family is again thrown upon its own resources, although work may be plenty, and the man abundantly able to perform it, yet that man and his family are apt to think it is not necessary to exert themselves as they have done in former years, that they can take the world easy. If such ideas should be realized and outdoor relief furnished them a second time, they will learn to rely upon the same source in every time of need ; such a family is then on the direct road to chronic pauperism.

In the second case we do not think that any gratuitous public relief should be furnished. The best way to aid such people is to help them to help themselves.

The problem of how to deal with the third class is probably most difficult to solve. When such a mother is respectable, honest, and industrious, and calculated to properly train her children, there would seem to be no other proper and humane course to pursue than to aid her by outdoor relief, so long as she takes proper care of her children and does all she can to aid in their support. But there is the same danger attending such a course as there is in furnishing outdoor relief to the first class—the danger of the mother relaxing her own efforts, losing self-respect and self-reliance.

The fourth class is not so difficult to manage. As a general rule, those who are single should be provided for in almshouses. But there are many married people who have been respectable and industrious during their early life who, through some misfortune, become dependent in their old age, and who have a dread of going to an almshouse, where they would generally have to be separated. Such people could be provided for by outdoor relief with as little as, and often with less expense than, at the almshouse. Such a course would be humane and just, and in it there would be no danger of doing injury to the recipients of such charity.

From the facts already stated it will be seen that the system of public outdoor relief is surrounded by many difficulties and dangers; and it has become a serious question whether the evils engendered and perpetuated thereby do not overbalance all the good effects produced.

We cannot ignore the fact that outdoor relief in some form and under certain circumstances is not only humane and just, but that it is an actual necessity in any civilized community. And the main question to determine is whether it shall be administered by people in their individual capacity at their own expense, by organized charitable associations with funds raised for the purpose by voluntary contributions of the people, or by public officials from money raised by tax upon the property.

The plan of leaving it all to individual charity is probably the most objectionable of all. Under such a system many of the worthy poor would be neglected, while relief to others would

be duplicated, and it would tend to create an army of beggars, going from door to door, which would become a nuisance in any community. The plan of leaving all outdoor relief to be administered through organized charitable associations, from funds voluntarily contributed, which has numerous able advocates and which has many good features to recommend it, like public relief has its defects.

There are important points in favor of the system; but the same tendency exists to encourage and increase pauperism under this method as under the system of public outdoor relief. We believe that outdoor relief in some form is a necessity, and is conducive to the good order and well-being of society, and we can see no reason why the necessary funds for its use should not be raised in the same manner as are other necessary expenses of a state or municipality. We believe that the trouble complained of under the public relief system lies in the abuse of the system and not in the system itself.¹

¹ "The Problem of Outdoor Relief," *N. C. C.*, 1888, pp. 141-54.

In a paper in *N. C. C.*, 1897 (p. 255), Mr. Ernest Bicknell says, quite in the spirit of the above: "I am compelled to confess my inability to propose a system of official outdoor relief which would meet the countless demands upon it. As society is at present organized, I doubt the wisdom of absolutely abolishing official outdoor relief, although that method of disposing of the entire matter appeals strongly to me."

Other arguments in favor of public outdoor relief, though similar in content to those quoted, may be found in the "Symposium," *N. C. C.*, 1891, referred to above (by Mr. J. Q. Adams and Mrs. M. J. Lily); and in the debate on "Outdoor Relief," in *N. C. C.*, 1878 (by Mr. Sanborn and Mr. H. W. Lord).